

No 10. *An Exhortation to Communicants.*

ed Titus—8th, last part.

—*Having no evil thing to say of you.*

*It is peculiar to the Christian Religion, to require of all who profess it, the Practice of every Virtue, and the Cultivation of every Grace, both social, moral, & religious. It enjoins the greatest care and circumspection, lest others should be infected by the contagion, or influenced by the prevalence of bad example. And to preserve this care and circumspection alive in the mind, it represents us as living, continually, under the Providence, and accountable to the Justice, of Almighty God.—That the yoke of Christianity, at the same time, might be easy, and the burthen of Religion light, all its Ordinances are calculated to inspire us with ardent hope, and invigorate us with invincible perseverance. But there is one distinguishing Ordinance, the Celebration of the Holy-Sacrament—which has a powerful Tendency to make us take such*

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heed unto our ways, that "no evil thing may, justly, be said of us." And as we have so lately appeared at the Altar of God to renew our Vows and ratify our Obedience, let me beg your serious attention, whilst I endeavour to impress upon our minds the many and weighty obligations we are under to live, with such vigilant and pious caution, that "no evil thing, in future, may be said of us." —

It was, indeed, with inconceivable Satisfaction, I perceived "the willing mind" which so evidently appeared amongst you to declare your conviction of the truth, and express your hopes, in the promises of the Gospel, by assembling, almost all, "with one consent," around the holy Altar. Imagination cannot form an earthly Scene more pleasing than this House of God then exhibited. Tho' you may not, all, be possessed of the goods of fortune, or the acquisitions of knowledge, there are Blessings in reserve for you, I trust, greater in value than the Empire of this world—"to



"sit at the right-hand, and at the left-hand," of your Redeemer and your God. However mean and contemptible we may some of us appear, thro' the obscurity of our situation, poverty of circumstances, or deplorable Ignorance, if "we discharge our duty in the state " of life unto which it has pleased God severally to " call us," the time may not be far distant, when the noble, the wealthy, and the learned, lamenting the want of that Knowledge which would have made them wise unto Salvation—may exclaim, with indignant disappointment—"we fools counted their lives " madness, and their end to be without honor; but " how are they numbered amongst the children of God, " and their Lot is amongst the Saints!" But then we are to consider it is not the mere act of receiving the Sacrament which will recommend us to mercy and intitle us to reward.—

To strengthen our resolutions—to animate our endeavors—and confirm our faith—let us consider the

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declarations and the promises we made before we approached the sacred Altar. " That we had truly and  
" earnestly repented of our sins—that we were in love  
" and charity with our neighbors—and that we intended to lead a new life," we declared in the most solemn manner, in which creatures could express themselves to their Creator. If we relapse into our former sins—if the Drunkard again drown his faculties in intemperance—if the Swearer continue to utter his shocking imprecations—if the Unjust persist in his arts of deceit—if the Slanderer restrain not his tongue from evil-speaking—we may say of each what Peter said to Ananias—" thou hast not lied unto men, but unto  
" God."—" Did we not acknowledge and bewail our manifold sins and wickedness which we, from time to  
" time, had committed against the Divine Majesty  
" of Heaven? Did we not declare them to be grievous unto us, and the burthen of them to be intolerable?"—And can we wish to obliterate the Remem-



brance of them, and render their Burthen lighter, &  
 easier to be born, when we are repeating the same sins  
 and the same provocations? The necessity of an uni-  
 formly pious life does not, I acknowledge, accord with  
 the ideas many people entertain concerning the Sacra-  
 ment—that it is necessary it should be received at the  
 three Festivals and other stated seasons, as a good old  
Custom that ought not to be broken—No—let no man  
 ever pollute the sacred Bread and Wine with his un-  
 hallowed Lips, who does not mean henceforth to become  
a better man—who does not mean henceforth to regu-  
 late his Conduct by the Precepts of the Gospel, and to  
 practise every virtue it enjoins, and renounce every vice  
 it forbids: if he communicates from any other princi-  
 ple—if he does not repent of his sins and amend his  
 life—“ he is guilty of the body and blood of Christ our  
 “ Saviour—he eats and drinks, dreadful denuncia-  
 “ tion! his own condemnation. Judge, therefore,  
 “ yourselves, my Brethren, that ye be not judged of the

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" Lord." Beseech Almighty God to " create a clean  
" heart and renew a right spirit within you," to enable  
you to fulfil your promises and keep your vows.—  
" We offer and present unto Thee, O Lord, ourselves,  
" our souls, and bodies"—such was the Language of  
our Lips, and of our Hearts, I trust, " to be a rea-  
" sonable, holy, and lively sacrifice unto Thee, humbly  
" beseeching Thee, that all we, who are partakers of this  
" holy Communion, may be fulfilled with thy Grace  
" and heavenly Benediction." After having entered  
into this solemn engagement—will you violate it thro'  
wantonness, or trample on it with contempt; especial-  
ly when you consider, that, by so doing, you are " pro-  
" voking, most justly, God's wrath and indignation  
" against you?"—It behoves us, indeed, Christians,  
" who desire to obtain, by the merits and death of Je-  
" sus Christ, and through faith in his blood, forgive-  
" ness of our sins, and all other benefits of his pas-  
" sion"—to act with peculiar caution that " no evil



"thing may be said of us."—Let every master of a family set an example to his household, "showing himself a pattern of good works," by his piety, his regularity, his equity, and justice in all his dealings and transactions: let him observe the Lord's Day with the seriousness it demands, both attending public worship himself, and requiring his children and servants to do the same: let him, on that day, more especially, acquaint himself with the revealed will of God, and instruct his family in the most useful of all learning—"the Knowledge of God unto salvation:"—and, let him take care, that he does not exhort to virtues he neglects to practice—or find fault with the commission of vices to which he is himself addicted: let him show, in his whole behaviour, what constitutes a good man: whatever may be the prevalence of his disposition and turn of mind—whether excessive passion—gloomy fullness—sordid avarice—or whatever "be the sin which easily besets him"—let him guard strictly

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against it—let him master the unruly Inclination which may have made him a trouble, or a terror, to his family—unhappy in himself, and offensive to others: let him behave to his Superiors with respect, to his Equals with cheerfulness, to his Inferiors with condescension; he will then be, what every man ought to be, a good man and a true Christian—he will be instanced as a man who practises what he professes; his life will be an Example to the Good, and a Resproof to the Wicked; Religion will suffer no diminution of excellence, severity of censure, or coldness of disdain, through his conduct—but, on the contrary, by producing in him such tranquility of mind, and simplicity of manners, will be recommended to the notice and observance of those, who had all along thought, “there was no beauty in it, that they should desire it.”—

Let servants, and those whose lot it is to be in the lower stations of life, consider well the obligations



they laid themselves under by celebrating the blessed Sacrament. "Exhort servants," says the Apostle, in the words following the text—by which he means all who depend on others for their subsistence—"to be obedient unto their own masters, and to please them well in all things, not answering again"—not rudely or impertinently provoking them—"not purloining"—not wronging them of any thing, however safely they may do it—"but shewing all good fidelity"—behaving themselves with scrupulous honesty and watchful care, that, by this uniformity of conduct, "they may adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things:"—let them consider—were they in the situations of those to whom they are indebted for their bread—what they would naturally require of the people they employed: let them often reflect, that it is in their power to occasion many vexatious disappointments by perverseness, negligence, and thoughtlessness: let them, as they may not have had the ad-

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vantages of education, endeavour to restrain their tempers, and humanize their minds: let them be resigned to their humble Lot—not murmuring, not repining—but “let them patiently tarry the Lord’s leisure:” let them continually offer up their prayers to Almighty God to endow them with those virtues which become their station, and let them praise his name that their condition is no worse. Let the Sacrament produce these blessed, these evangelical effects—the effects it naturally ought to produce—and every master, whatever may be his own Sentiments, or his own Conduct, will devoutly wish for religious Servants, and for every one he employs, in whatever Capacity, to be religious.

And here, what shall I say, how shall I address myself to those who refuse every Invitation to receive the holy Sacrament? say, after ye had departed from this house, dedicated to God—when you considered what Blessings the people of God were receiving



whom you had left behind—"did not your hearts  
 "burn within you?"—When you considered the obligations you are under, out of gratitude to your Redeemer, out of regard to yourselves, to receive the blessed Sacrament—did you look on this act of careless negligence, or, rather, of desperate defiance, without indignation, and without abhorrence?—Did you think, after Jesus Christ had sent you an affectionate Invitation—after He had given you a peremptory Command—to eat and drink at his own Table—you were justifiable in not accepting his Invitation—in not paying obedience to his Command? It is the Invitation of Him, who, to reconcile you to God, shed his Blood on the cross—it is the Command of Him, "who is able to destroy both body and soul in hell."—For the neglect of this duty, no man's Conscience, I believe, will afford consolation: you may hear its Remonstrances, at present, without concern—but when

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Death draws nigh to execute his Commission, you will then be overwhelmed with its Reproaches, and distracted with its Terrors. The Season of Death is awful, but Death is only the prelude to Judgment. At the Bar of Judgment your Excuses are to be weighed in an even balance, and, you are conscious, they will be found light. Were you enjoined the performance of certain duties by a human Legislature, & in consequence of your neglect, were summoned before a Court of Judicature—if you could offer no stronger reasons in your justification than you will be able to assign for refusing to receive the Sacrament—however subtilty might invent—ingenuity evade—or eloquence adorn—be your mode of Trial what it might—you would, unquestionably, be pronounced guilty. And whether corporal punishment, or fine, or imprisonment, or death, in all its aggravation of horrors, is more to be dreaded than the irrevocable Sentence—"Depart



"from me ye cursed into everlasting fire"—be yourselves the Judges—but judge for God's sake, before it be too late!

Suffer me, in conclusion, again to request those who received the Sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ, to give all diligence to adorn their Christian profession.—If you pretend to "set your affections on things above, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God," let it be your constant care to manifest a peaceable demeanour, upright conduct, & an holy life. If you run into the same excess of riot with other men, you furnish the enemies of Religion with the arms of Truth, and they will not fail to wield them to advantage. But, revolve only in your mind the vows of obedience you made at the Altar, and you will preserve alive, in your breasts, the spirit of piety, which conducted you thither; and, "as the hart panteth after the water brooks, so will your souls long to eat again of the Bread which came

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"down from heaven, and to drink again of the fountain of life, which cleanseth from all sin."—"Be afraid of being overtaken" in the commission of any, the least, sin: for you would not only endanger your own souls, but cast a shameful Reproach, an indelible Stain, on that holy Religion, the truth of which Jesus Christ sealed with "his most precious Blood." But you, who openly enlisted under the Banners of Christ—you, who acknowledged Him to be "the Captain of your Salvation," will never, I pray God, basely desert his Standard. Anxious to have a claim to that state, "where the wicked cease from troubling, and where the weary are at rest"—as you have begun, continue, persevere unto the end, to walk in the path of duty—distinguish yourselves by the practise of every moral virtue, and the observance of every religious precept; rely, with unshaken firmness, on the mercy of God, through the all-sufficient Merits of your Redeemer, and you will assuredly obtain, without



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the end of your cares, and the object of your hopes—  
Salvation.

Theoph<sup>s</sup>. J. St. John.

Entered at Stationers Hall.

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the chapter of disappointment, and the signs of life.

the end of your career, and the light of your hope.

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